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SUBJECT: WORLD AIRWAYS' PASSENGERS STRANDED IN LAGOS

REF: ABUJA 2216

SUMMARY: According to Senior World Airways staff, all flights to and from the United States to Lagos have been cancelled effective January 1, 2004, until further notice. This will affect between 800 and 1,000 current ticket holders. END SUMMARY.

1. On January 5, 2004, Embassy Econoff spoke with Senior World Airways officials who confirmed the suspension of all World Airways flights between the United States and Nigeria effective January 1, 2004. World Airways told Econoff that the airline chose not to renew its contract with Ritetime, which served as the World Airways booking agent, after it expired on December 31, 2003, because Ritetime owed World Airways over USD 2 million in arrears payments for charter services. This will leave between 800 and 1,000 passengers stranded in Nigeria. When passengers arrive at the World Airways office in Lagos, they encounter a sign on the door that states "Effective immediately, all flights are cancelled until further notice." World Airways' staff in Lagos left for Belgium due to security concerns as airline officials have received reports that stranded passengers are creating disturbances in Atlanta, New York and Lagos.

2. ConOff is working to get a more accurate count of the number of stranded AmCits; however, it is estimated that more than half could be dual nationals. World Airways' tickets are charter tickets and cannot be used on other international flights. Any inquiries concerning World Airways flights should be directed to Ritetime Travel in Lagos, 011-234-1-270-5600 or in the United States at (770) 613-0011.

3. According to Nigerian news accounts, Ritetime Managing Director, Dr. Peter Obafemi is promising a flight on Thursday to get the stranded passengers out. We do not have independent confirmation of this.

4. World Airways, through its public relations office in Lagos will issue a press release in the next few days explaining why they halted service.

HINSON-JONES